Steering Documents and Types of Activities

A renewed legislation in ECEC

The regulative framework for early childhood education and care in Finland went through a major reform between 2015 and 2018.

The principal steering documents in ECEC are:

- Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018)
- Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018)
- National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018)

The central principles and overall objectives of early childhood education and care are outlined in the ECEC Act.

The Act defines ECEC as a planned and goal-oriented entity of education, upbringing and care, with an emphasis on pedagogy. The strong emphasis on pedagogy is new in the legislation. Moreover ECEC is now defined as a right of the child whereas the earlier focus was on the parents’ entitlement to have a day care place for their children.

The Act defines 10 central goals of early childhood education and care. A key task of the ECEC is to support the child's holistic growth, development, well-being and health. ECEC also has an important role in promoting lifelong learning as well as equity and equality. The law emphasises the role and participation of children and parents in the organisation and implementation of ECEC.

Local curricula based on a national core curriculum

Based on the revised legislation in 2015, the Finnish National Agency for Education (FINEDU) became the national expert agency in ECEC with the responsibility to prepare a national core curriculum for ECEC. The FINEDU confirmed the first National Core Curriculum for ECEC in October 2016.

In compliance with the second stage of legislative reform, the national core curriculum was revised already in 2018 but no significant changes were introduced in this update.

The stakeholders involved in the preparation of the national core curriculum represented widely the views of administration, world of research, labour market partners, ECEC personnel and other experts. The process also included an open online consultation for the public.
The national core curriculum is a norm based on which local providers draw up local and unit-specific curricula and plans, as well as individual ECEC plans for each child.

At the local level, ECEC and administrative personnel have the main responsibility for drafting the curricula, but also parents’, children’s and different cooperation partners’ voice should be heard in the development and evaluation of curricula. New local curricula were introduced in August 2017 and revised in 2019.

The aim is that the local curricula for ECEC, pre-primary education and basic education constitute an integrated whole where different levels of education form a logical continuum from the children’s point of view.

**An entity of education, instruction and care with a pedagogical emphasis**

ECEC is, as defined by the law, a planned and goal-oriented entity of education, instruction and care, with an emphasis on pedagogy. The three dimensions form an integrated whole that aims to support the learning and overall well-being of the child.

The dimensions are emphasised differently according to the child’s age and the situation. Teaching and guidance are embedded in different situations and activities during the child’s day in ECEC.

**Integrative pedagogical activities**

The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) defines learning areas that describe the key objectives and contents of pedagogical activities.

The learning areas are grouped into five entities:

- Rich world of languages
- Diverse forms of expression
- Me and our community
- Exploring and interacting with my environment
- I grow, move and develop.

Rather than approached as separate entities, the themes of different learning areas are combined and applied according to the children’s interests and competence. Children’s interests and questions serve as a key premise for planning and implementing the activities.

**Transversal competence**

A central goal of the ECEC is to strengthen children’s transversal competences. Transversal competence is an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. The development of transversal competence promotes children’s growth as individuals and as members of their community and society.

The national core curriculum for ECEC defines five interconnected competence areas:

- thinking and learning
- cultural competence, interaction and self-expression
- taking care of oneself and managing daily life
- multiliteracy and competence in ICT
- participation and involvement.
The objectives of transversal competence have guided the preparation of the national core curricula for ECEC, pre-primary education and basic education.

**The framework for pedagogical activities in ECEC**

The framework for pedagogical activities in ECEC as defined in the national core curriculum:

The personnel are free to choose teaching methods and teaching and learning materials as long as they are in line with the principles defined in the national core curriculum.

**Teaching methods and materials**

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Versatile working methods

The objectives and contents of the learning areas and the framework for pedagogical activities as defined in the national core curriculum guide the personnel in planning and implementing versatile and integrative pedagogical activities together with the children.

The goals set for the ECEC and the age, needs, prerequisites and interests of children guide the selection working methods. The personnel guide the children to experiment with and use different working methods in groups of different sizes and independently.

The core curriculum encourages versatile and functional working methods that promote the creativity, interaction and participation of children. Children are encouraged to express themselves, ask questions, solve problems together and explore the world with all their senses and their entire bodies.

Play as a source for development, learning and well-being

Play as source of development, learning and well-being is a key working method in early childhood education and care. The ECEC must provide children with opportunities for different kinds of play and games, both supervised and free.

Learning environments

Learning environments in ECEC should promote children’s healthy self-esteem, learning and social skills. They nurture children’s play and their enthusiasm for exploring, experimenting and practicing things. They guide them to be physically active, express themselves through art and experience art.

Learning environments are designed to strengthen equity and gender equality. They promote children’s linguistic development and make cultural diversity visible.

Learning environments and working methods are developed together with the children. Children's ideas, play and outcomes of their efforts are visible in learning environments.

Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) [1] (in Finnish)
